

Two previously undocumented first records for Kenya

During the course of numerous enquiries at several overseas museums concerning Kenya birds in their collections, two specimens have been located which, by virtue of their date of collection, were the first records of both species concerned for Kenya. We document these records below.

Fringilla leucophaea Smith's Francolin

Los Angeles County Museum specimen #88473. A female collected by K. Stager on 4 October 1973 at 1950 m on Mt Kulal (2°43'N, 36°56'E). This little known francolin was previously known in East Africa from three specimens collected at 2150–2450 m on Mt Moroto, northeast Uganda, on 11–14 May 1963, and from sight records at 1500 m in the Kidepo Valley National Park in 1966. The Moroto and Kulal birds were assigned to the race *archeri*.

Alcedo quadribrachys Shining-blue Kingfisher

British Museum (Natural History) Tring specimen No. 1965-M-5691. A male collected on 6 November 1905 in the Kabware Forest, Nandi District by Col. R. Meinertzhagen. A notation "shot when with advanced guard and just before a small ambush" illustrates the remarkable dexterity and presence of mind of this intrepid naturalist during his early days in Kenya.

More recently there have been two records of this species in Kenya, with one present in the Kakamega Forest from 20 November 1974 to 27 January 1975, and one near Alupe on the Kenya–Uganda border north of Busia on 21 August 1990.

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Smith's Francolin *Fringilla leucophaea* and other distributional records from the Huri Hills, northern Kenya

On 21 January 1989, while travelling through the southern end of the Huri Hills, northern Kenya (c. 3°30'N, 37°47'E), the authors, together with A. L. Archer, noted a smallish francolin creeping in tall grass by the side of the main track. This bird and a second individual were flushed and flew about 200 m, but could not be found again. In flight they showed conspicuous rufous wing patches, bordered by a narrow dark edge along the ends of the flight feathers. Their springing take-off and easy flight suggested a lighter, smaller bird than Shelley's Francolin *F. shelleyi*. Of the three red-winged francolin species listed

for Kenya by Britton (1980) and by Lewis & Pomeroy (1989) Shelley's ranges north as far as Mt Kenya, while the Moorland Francolin *F. psilolaemus* is essentially confined to altitudes above about 1800 m and the Red-wing *F. levaillantii* occurs in the southwest. It was assumed, therefore, that the Huri Hills birds were Smith's (or Orange River) Francolin *F. levaillantoides*, a bird frequent to common (race *lorti*) in southern Ethiopia near the Kenya border (Urban, Fry & Keith 1986).

The authors returned to spend two days in the Huris from 10–12 November 1989, during the short rains. In the higher rolling volcanic grasslands in the middle section of the hills at c. 1100 m, Smith's Francolins were heard and seen well and conclusively identified. A repeated four-note call, similar to that of Shelley's, was heard at dawn and in the late afternoon of 11 November in the green but shortish (c. 0.3-m-high) grass. It was tape-recorded, and a playback induced further persistent calling, and eventually a pair of birds was seen, and watched almost clear of the vegetation down to a range of about 15 m. The birds were patterned tawny brown above, with long creamy streaks, and creamy white below with fine grey barring just visible at close range. The flanks were broadly streaked with rich tawny, while the breast and lower neck were more finely streaked the same colour. The greyish white throat was bordered by a blackish line. A buffy-white supercilium extended back into a finely black and white speckled band down the side of the neck. Otherwise the top and sides of the head were pale tawny-buff, the top of the head, with dark speckling. The legs were yellow. The dark brown bordered wing patches were always conspicuous in flight.

The birds differed from Shelley's in being smaller, lacking black barring below and in having a prominent pale supercilium. The call, a quick four-note *ki-keer, ki-kit*, repeated once per second about five times, was slightly shriller and faster than the call of Shelley's, and was accented on the second syllable. The pair often allowed close approach when calling, but were usually hidden in the grass, with only the upward-pointing head of the calling bird visible. They remained close to a small grassy hillock from which calling usually took place. Other birds were heard from two points across the valley less than 1 km away. The November site was some 5 km north of the point where the birds were found in January. It is clear that the species is reasonably common in the higher parts of the Huris. It has not been recorded previously from Kenya, but is known from extreme southeast Sudan and northeast Uganda (Urban, Fry & Keith 1986). However, there is a specimen of a female (of the race *archeri*) in the Los Angeles County Museum, collected at 6500 feet (1980 m) by K. Stager on 4 October 1973 from Mt Kulal (2°43'N, 36°56'E) to the west (Turner, Zimmerman & Pearson 1991).

A quick survey during the November visit, from the highest grassy parts of the Huri Hills down to the lower, drier *Acacia* bush just south of Mt Farole and the Ethiopian border, produced three more findings of particular distributional interest. Coqui Francolins *F. coqui* were heard calling on several occasions in the grassland where Smith's was found. These are the first records from northern Kenya and presumably relate to the southern Ethiopian race *maharao*. Other races in Kenya are confined to the west, the central highlands and the coast. Rufous Short-toed Larks *Calandrella somalica* were abundant in flocks of up to hundreds in the higher short grassy valleys. Although locally common in south and southeast Kenya, this species has not been reported in the north. There is a record from Samburu Game Reserve which Britton (1980) suggests may have involved the race *megaensis*, and the Huri Hills birds must surely belong to this race, which occurs in the nearby Mega and Yabello areas of Ethiopia (White 1961). Several Pectoral-patch Cisticolas *Cisticola brunnescens* were seen and heard performing their song-flights on the high grassland on a dull misty morning. These were presumably of the nominate race which

occurs in the Ethiopian highlands, and so far unrecorded in Kenya. Finally, in the drier open *Acacia* bush below 900 m at the northern end of the hills, about ten Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* were flushed singly during an hour's walking, and the species was evidently quite common. From their rather pale appearance, and from the habitat and altitude at which they were found, these were presumed to have been nominate Palaearctic birds, perhaps newly arrived passage migrants.

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Secretary Bird *Sagittarius serpentarius* feeding on Marsh Warblers *Acrocephalus palustris* in Tsavo, Kenya

In the autumn, during favourable weather conditions of mist and no moon, thousands of Palaearctic migrants come to ground at Ngulia Lodge (3°00'S, 38°13'E), Tsavo National Park (West), Kenya (Pearson & Backhurst 1976, and annual reports in *Scopus*). In early November 1990, the area was still dry with few green leaves and little new grass growth. No Secretary Birds *Sagittarius serpentarius* were seen in this time. However, during the December visit, by which time the area was green and lush, I regularly saw a pair of Secretary Birds, either soaring overhead or patrolling the area on foot.

After the misty and wet night of 17 December several hundred migrants had been grounded and many remained in the shrubby area around the lodge during the day. I saw two Secretary Birds slowly walking through the grass and shrubby area to the west of the lodge, searching for food in the middle of the day. One of the birds interrupted its slow striding walk and ran forward fast—obviously hunting an animal which was trying to escape in the rank grass. After 10–15 s of kicking in the grass, the Secretary Bird grabbed a small warbler with its bill and, with a few jerks, turned the warbler's body round and swallowed it. I continued to watch the Secretary Bird and, after a few minutes, I saw it take and swallow another warbler, which I was able to identify as a Marsh Warbler *Acrocephalus palustris*, from the grass.

Secretary Birds are said to be opportunistic feeders; they regularly eat rodents, reptiles, large beetles and grasshoppers, and any small animal up to the size of a hare (*Lepus*) may be eaten if caught (Brown, *et al.* 1982, Kemp 1985). Eggs and chicks of ground-nesting birds may also be eaten (Kemp 1985). Feeding is always on the ground and the prey is immobilized by kicks from the short stout toes and their nail-like claws (Kemp 1985). Mobile prey is captured by running, sometimes aided by wing-flapping. The only notes of